Guidance on Steers and Targets

This guidance covers steers and targets for our Doctoral Training Network. Please note that the guidance on steers only applies to Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs).

ESRC has awarded additional studentships and applied a steer to DTPs considered strong in a priority area to ensure that capacity is built in them. These DTPs are required to allocate a minimum number of their studentships to these areas. Should the DTP secure co-funding for any of these studentships, we encourage DTPs to assign the additional studentships secured through co-funding to the same priority area.

We have also set a target for all DTPs and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) that at least 30 per cent of each cohort should be engaged in some form of non-academic collaboration and that 50 per cent of studentships are allocated on a four (or more) year basis.

The following information should be read alongside the ESRC Doctoral Training Management and Monitoring Framework and is intended to provide additional guidance on how ESRC will assess that steered studentships are being used appropriately, what counts as non-academic collaboration, and how we will calculate whether a DTP has met the 50 per cent target for four (or more) year awards.

Version Control:

June 2018 update	The 'Use of Datasets' steer has been relaxed for studentships starting from October 2019
	Web links have been updated due to the transition to UKRI
	Collaboration with non-academic partners – further information has been included to expand the definitions
	Balance of funding structures – now includes a reflection on the balance of awards within the first cohort of studentships and details on a secure site to share masters information across the Doctoral Training Network.
	Information on the Cross Council Funding Agreement (CCFA) has been included

The ESRC Strategic Plan (2015) reiterates our core commitment to enhance social science capability and build capacity in priority areas. The central part of these steered studentships is to build capacity in these areas.

Advanced quantitative methods (AQM)

Training for students on an AQM studentship is expected to be at a level over and above the basic generic and subject-specific methods requirements for that discipline.

DTPs will need to:

- Justify how the proposed methods for collecting and/or analysing data are assessed as being of a level that constitutes advanced quantitative methods within the specified discipline.
- Describe how the proposed methods map on to the research questions to be addressed and will be used to move beyond core quantitative techniques in the student's discipline.
- Demonstrate how the individual training needs of the student are clearly identified and are above and beyond basic generic and subject specific requirements. The arrangements for meeting those training needs should be clearly specified.
- Identify how the DTP will monitor the on-going training needs of AQM students to ensure that these continue to be met.

Use of datasets - Changes from October 2019

In order to build capacity in data skills and analysis as well as promoting the analysis of a wide range of data sources within the academic community, the guidance on this steer is being relaxed from October 2019.

Whilst still encouraging the use of ESRC funded datasets, we recognise the importance of students developing skills using big data as well as administrative and linked data and therefore have removed the requirement for ESRC-funded data to be used. The steered studentships now have greater flexibility in their choice of datasets.

For information, Appendix 1 shows the ESRC-funded data resources and infrastructure that the steered studentships in cohort one and two were required to use.

Interdisciplinary research which straddles other research council remits

We welcome interdisciplinary studentships as we recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences, and between the social sciences and other areas of research. The principal aim of this steer is to provide a mechanism by which students can tackle a project that is genuinely interdisciplinary in nature and straddles the social sciences and other research council remits. The proposed research should include substantive interaction between the relevant scientific areas and the studentship should provide training that is not constrained to one scientific approach.

Studentships steered in this area must be 50 per cent social science and no more than two thirds. Applications must be genuinely interdisciplinary and inclusive; they should not exclude the approaches of either Council and we would not expect any application to have a share ratio greater than 2:1. Whilst we encourage cross council funding for these studentships, this is not a mandatory element of the steer.

DTPs will need to:

- Justify how the studentship falls across Research Council remits and how this split meets the share ratio required. Responses should include reference to accredited interdisciplinary pathways where relevant.
- Justify how this training will prepare the student to be able to work effectively across scientific boundaries.
- Describe how the interdisciplinary split supports the research questions to be addressed.
- Demonstrate how the individual training needs of the student are clearly identified and that training is provided across all relevant scientific areas. The arrangements for meeting those training needs should be clearly specified.
- Identify how the DTP will monitor the on-going interdisciplinary training needs of the student to ensure that these continue to be met.

The following are examples of the types of studentships which would be viewed as meeting the steer:
- The social neuroscience of interpersonal actions and interactions
- The effects of pesticides on child health: a case study of Huichol Indians
- Self-monitoring of Blood pressure in Patients with Hypertension and Diabetes: Who self-monitors and why
- Economic values of rift forests – Use in conservation policy development
- Tools for Trust: Assessing the most effective methods for hazard communication

Supervisory Arrangements

We expect joint supervisory arrangements for these studentships, with one supervisor from the social sciences and one supervisor with a background in the other relevant scientific area. If both supervisors are based in the same department one must have a social science background and the other must have a background in the additional discipline. If either, or both, supervisors consider themselves to be interdisciplinary (i.e. already may have a mix of social and medical science research training and experience) this should be fully explained.

Research Council Remits

Each of the Research Councils publishes information on its website about its current research grants portfolio. This information can be accessed at:

- [Arts & Humanities Research Council](#)
- [Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council](#)
- [Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council](#)
- [Economic & Social Research Council](#)
- [Medical Research Council](#)
- [Natural Environment Research Council](#)
- [Science and Technology Facilities Council](#)

Our joint statement with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) relating to the interfaces between the arts and humanities and the social sciences may also be useful:

- ☐ [Interfaces between the arts and humanities and the social sciences (PDF, 65Kb)](#)

Although not applicable for studentships, the Cross-Council Funding Agreement (CCFA) is a mechanism used by the research councils to collaborate on the peer review and funding of research proposals that straddle their remits under their 'responsive-mode' research grants schemes. Useful information on this agreement can be found here: https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/applications-across-research-council-remits/

Collaboration with non-academic partners

DTPs have been set a target to have at least 30 per cent of each cohort engaged in some form of non-academic collaboration. Progress against the target will be monitored through annual reports. If, by the third year, students in the first two cohorts are not meeting the target or not at least on track to meet the target, studentships may be reduced and reallocated elsewhere.

Substantial non-academic user engagement is an essential part of collaboration. We are not prescriptive about the type of collaboration, but rather ask DTPs to demonstrate that it has been developed in collaboration with other non-academic organisations and involves substantive user engagement and knowledge exchange activity. The collaboration itself can take many forms but is intended to provide practical experience of working with non-academic partners to assist doctoral students develop and enhance their broader transferable skills and knowledge. Examples of collaboration include:

- A CASE style studentship which delivers a co-produced research idea and is co-supervised with a partner organisation.
- Internships (including those administered by UKRI) which provide the opportunity for students to work in a host user organisation for a period of time (typically three months) applying social science skills in a practical situation to a topic of interest to both the student and host organisation.
- A short-term focussed research project between a non-academic organisation and student. It is expected that this would be shorter than an internship and not require the student to be based at the host organisation.

There are some examples of how students have engaged in collaborative activities on our website and we will be adding to these shortly.

We are not proposing to set targets on the number of students which have to undertake specific types of activity, but we would expect to see a range of activities, including CASE style studentships and internships.

The general principles of what activities count towards the collaborative target are:

- To contribute to the 30 per cent target collaborations do not need to be co-funded, 'in-kind' engagement is recognised though there are clear benefits to securing co-funding.
- Collaborations must be with a non-academic organisations in the public, private or civil-society sector.

- Collaborations must include substantive knowledge exchange and not just one way engagement (e.g. data collection).

Balance of Funding Structures

We want to ensure that we support the most talented students whatever their background and regardless of where they undertook their first degree. To ensure this happens we have placed a number of requirements on our DTPs relating to widening participation. These are summarised below:

- Selection processes to be open and transparent and enable the potential of the candidate to be assessed whether they are applying on a full or part-time basis, whether they have prior research training or not, and regardless of their demographic background.
- All studentships to be available on a full or part-time basis and the availability of part-time awards must be clearly set out when advertising funding opportunities. Investments must have indicated within their bid where it was not possible to offer part-time across a pathway.
- The option of studying on a 1+3 type award must be clearly advertised and accommodated within the assessment process.
- Studentships awarded on a +3 training pathway must have already completed the majority of our core methods requirements as set out in the Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2015.
- Opportunities for ESRC-funded studentships to be actively publicised both within and beyond the host institutions.

Since the introduction of the DTPs in 2017, we have been encouraged by the shift to awarding more +3 studentships. Our assurance checking processes have also confirmed that DTPs are working to ensure that all those on a +3 studentship meet the threshold requirements and that students who are unable to self-fund a Masters do not find this a barrier to entering postgraduate training.

The requirement will remain in place, with DTPs working to ensure a 50:50 split between three and four-year awards (this includes 1+3, 2+2, +4) averaged over the six-year cohort (excluding collaborative and associated studentships (formerly known as grant-linked studentships)).

To assist DTPs at the recruitment stage, a secure site on the ESRC DocNet has also been created, allowing DTPs to share and view those masters courses judged to provide the core training requirements as part of the DTP accreditation process.

If the DTP needs to support more than 50 per cent of four year studentships they can do this through the flexibility of the grant and if necessary reduce the overall number of students supported to enable this. DTPs will be expected to report on the balance of different types of awards in their annual report and we reserve the right to reduce funding where there is a substantial imbalance between three and four-year allocations on an ongoing basis.

Appendix 1 – Available ESRC-funded data resources and infrastructure

Please note all resources are accessible via the UK Data Service (www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/) unless stated otherwise.

Longitudinal resources
- British Household Panel Survey
- Understanding Society
- 1958 National Child Development Survey
- British Cohort Study 1970
- Next Steps (Longitudinal Study of Young Persons in England)
- Millennium Cohort Study
- UK Census Longitudinal Studies (http://calls.ac.uk/guides-resources/applying-to-use-the-lss/)
- English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

Biosocial resources
- Understanding Society Biosocial Sweep
- 1958 National Child Development Study Biosocial Sweep
- English Longitudinal Study of Ageing Genome-Wide Association Study
- Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/researchers/data-access/)

Big Data resources
- Administrative Data Research Network (www.adrn.ac.uk)
- Business and Local Government Data Research Centre (www.blgdataresearch.org)
- Consumer Data Research Centre (www.cdrc.ac.uk)
- Urban Big Data Centre (www.ubdc.ac.uk)

Please note that the Administrative Data Service (ADS) and the Administrative Data Research Centre for England (ADRC-E) will no longer be putting forward new project proposals to the ADRN Approval Panel.

Proposals which plan to use data already available via the ADRN can contact the relevant Research Centre in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. (See here for details of those datasets.)

Election resources
- British Election Study
- British election study ethnic minority surveys
- Scottish Election Studies
- Welsh Election Studies
- Northern Ireland Election Study

- Scottish Referendum Study
- Local Election Studies Database

Employment resources
- Skills and Employment Survey Series
- Workplace Employment Relations Surveys

International comparative resources
- European Social Survey
- Harmonised European Time Use Study 2000 (The data from the Harmonised European Time Use Study 2015 will be available from March 2016 and will offer comparative opportunities through a harmonised dataset)
- International Social Survey Programme (www.gesis.org/en/issp/home/)
- Multinational Time Use Study (http://www.timeuse.org/mtus.html)

Linguistics resources
- British National Corpus
- British Sign Language Corpus

Qualitative resources
- Timescapes (http://timescapes.researchdata.leeds.ac.uk/)
- Poverty and Social Exclusion Qualitative Surveys
- Ritual, Community and Conflict Ethnographic Dataset on Ritual (www.icea.ox.ac.uk/fundedprojects/ritual00/data/ethnographic-resources/)
- Access Research Knowledge Qualitative Archives on Ageism and Conflict (www.ark.ac.uk/qual/ageism/)

Other resources
- Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK: Research Surveys 2012
- Northern Ireland Life and Times
- Kids' Life and Times
- Young Life and Times Survey